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Last-minute push passes lake legislation

By Joyce L. Miller/Lake Sun

LAKE OF THE OZARKS - A number of pieces of legislation that will have an impact on Camden, Miller and Morgan counties managed to make it to the governor's desk.

The final week of the session drew its typical last-minute rush to get legislation through before the Friday evening deadline.

Lake area legislators described it as intense.

It was down to the wire for the .08 bill that will lower the legal limit for boating while intoxicated on Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri and Mississippi rivers.

In the last hours of the legislative session, the bill made it through a final vote along with an emergency clause making it effective as soon as it is signed by the governor. The bill also stiffens the penalties for BWIs. The bill was sponsored by state Rep. Rodney Schad, R-Versailles.

After weeks of political maneuvering and days of speculation, the repeal of the controversial 'village law' managed to make it through the Missouri Senate and House and is headed to the governor's desk to await his signature.

That bill was of particular interest to Camden County, where landowners were lining up to form their own villages.

Legislation sponsored by Rep. Wayne Cooper, R-Camdenton, will change the way treatment is delivered to stroke and heart attack victims by improving emergency response care. The legislation expands the emergency system by developing guidelines for designating stroke and STEMI centers where victims will be taken for treatment rather than just the nearest hospital.

Passage of Senate Bill 711 may mean some tax relief for lake area residents when it comes to paying for services like schools, ambulance and fire fighting.

The bill mandates that all taxing jurisdictions, regardless of whether they are operating at or below their tax rate ceiling, must roll back their tax rate to counter reassessment

increases.

Currently, only taxing jurisdictions operating at their tax rate ceiling are required by Missouri's Constitution to roll back to protect taxpayers, leaving taxing jurisdictions operating below their ceiling to approve back door tax increases with no legal recourse.

The bill closes a loophole that allows taxing districts to apply new voter approved levies to future and unknown assessments. It also requires that taxpayers receive a projected tax liability along with their reassessment notices.

Under the provisions of the bill, the Senior Citizen Property Tax Credit award goes from \$750 to \$1,100 for homeowners and expands eligibility for homeowners, not renters, up to an income of \$30,000 for singles and \$34,000 for married couples at a cost of approximately \$5.8 million.

Plus, another change means those who qualify for assistance through the Homestead Preservation Tax Credit with increases of more than 5 percent in their property tax costs will now be guaranteed some level of help, even if appropriations for the program are lower than needed to cover all costs.

Cooper was successful in getting a change through the legislature on how the assessor's office in Camden County is funded. That bill changed the requirement determining which counties must withhold 1 percent of all property taxes to be deposited into the county's assessment fund

Although not nearly as controversial as the village law, a bill passed in 2007 that changed the voting mechanism for the formation of transportation development districts was challenged by lake area highway advocates for allowing one vote per acre instead of one vote per person.

The House and Senate voted to do away with the one vote per acre and restored it to one vote per person.

The voting provision received widespread support from the lake area. The Lake of the Ozarks Transportation Council is hoping to use a TDD for extending Route 42 and other road improvements in the lake area. They said one vote per acre harmed the chances of using the funding incentive for future projects.